

DEC 10 1996

DIVERSITY FROM
LIBRARYRECEIVED
FEB 26 2024

BY:

Affirmation

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Concerns



Winter

**Fall 1996****Volume 21****Number 34**

Personal Observations of Quilt Weekend in Washington

By Judy Cara Hicks

Like thousands of other friends, family, lovers and survivors, I traveled to Washington, D.C. to observe the display of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt over the Columbus Day weekend. My best friend, David, and I went specifically to submit a panel in honor of the lives of our close friends, Michael Troyer and Joseph Zendell, who both succumbed to HIV-AIDS related illnesses a few years ago. Michael was one of the earliest members of Affirmation and was directly responsible for introducing David and I to the organization several years ago. Joseph and Michael had been lovers and life mates since 1985 and the four of us had formed a close knit "family."

Please turn to page Five. . .

The Struggle to Find a Gay Theology The Theme of the Fall Gathering

Dr. Elias Farajaje-Jones led our Gathering in New York in thinking about theology from a gay—he would say queer—perspective. Dr. Farajaje-Jones taught for ten years at Howard University Divinity School, is now at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, AND is an outrageous and outraged Queer.

Farajaje-Jones' use of the word queer was uncomfortable for some. But it is significant for just that reason. The whole project of doing theology is an inherently risky proposition which, if worth the effort, challenges our world view and probably makes

Please turn to page Two

In This Issue

- A Major Advance for Gays, Lesbians..... 3.
- The Bible and Homosexuality..... 4.
- Revisiting Sodom - Genesis - 19*
- News of Local Groups..... 6. & 7.
- Listening to the Woman Who Used to
be Married to Lot..... 10.
- Poetry by Jeanne Knepper*

Please Take Note:
CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR COUNCIL
See Page Eleven for Details

Gay Theology. . .from Page One. . .

Furthermore, we have plenty of reason to understand the evil derived from forms of theological thinking which use such demonizing labels in their efforts to exclude us from the community of faith. In articulating our theology, we name and claim our experience of God's liberating power, turning the world's homophobia on its head: Queer theology.

Do we simply add another voice to the "liberating theology" choir, or are we talking something different? From the outset, Farajae-Jones raised a challenge to the notion that gay theology represents a simple variant of "liberation theology." The very diversity of our community calls us to re-think our language:

Not liberation, but *liberating*

Not theology but *thea/ology*

Not *thea/ology*, but *thea/ologies*.

There are some significant ways in which "liberation theology" fails to work in the struggle to articulate the theology of the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered/and Questioning (LGBTQ) Community. That mouthful of identifiers itself gives us a clue. One of the most profound gifts we have received from Feminist, Womanist, Latin American, MinJong and other liberation theologies is that our thinking about God cannot be separated from the context in which we, as individuals and communities, experience God.

The Queer Community is both gifted and challenged by its diversity as we seek to express how we experience God. Our *thea/ological* articulations cannot be presumed to be "one size fits all." We would be poorer if they did, for our experience is enriched by Lesbians who are also Womanist, by Bisexual folk who are also "two-spirit" First Americans, by Gay men who are Black, by poor Lesbians who are Feminist and Gay men who are White and also wealthy, and so on and so on! So while we may never have a "Gay Theology" we can work on queering *thea/ologies*!

Farajae-Jones also challenges us to think beyond human conceptions, such as gender, in our God talk. His term, *thea/ologies*, reminds us to work in the broadest frame possible when we study, think, imagine, talk, write, sing, dream, dance and drum our experience of God into understanding.

We did some naming of the sources of oppression from which we are liberating our-

selves:

- ♦ Dishonesty of orthodoxy: assumes a (specific) universal meaning in scripture and theology (as defined by those in power)

- ♦ Hetero-normativity: heterosexuality is "normal" and compulsory

- ♦ Erotophobia: fear of erotic feelings, expression and action

- ♦ Disembodied theology: dualistic separation of spirit from body, in which spirit is good, body is bad; heaven is sought, earth is exploited, and any group associated with body and earth are demonized (us, but also native peoples, nature healers, etc.)

- ♦ Androcentric church structures and a theology which assumes the maleness of God

- ♦ Compartmentalism: dividing of one group or process from another, e.g. poetry is not theology; theology is not concerned with economics or ecology; racism, sexism, heterosexism are not connected to anti-immigrant sentiment.

We also claimed the liberating messages we find in scripture and our experiences of God. Scriptural analysis and *thea/ology* offer us some interesting opportunities to turn the

world's presumptions upside down. Take for example the Sodom and Gomorrah story. We begin from the liberating perspective that, taken as a whole, the scrip-

tures demonstrate that God has and makes a "preferential option for the poor." The word for poor in Hebrew (*unavim*) is used for a number of disrespected persons or groups: the poor, lepers, women as a class in ritual terms, undesirables, strangers and outcasts.

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is not about the sin of homosexuality, but about the sin of rejection, refusal to love those whom God has sent, the *unavim* (who in this case happen to be angels). These townfolk are destroyed because they are inhospitable to the visitors. LGBTQ people are staying away in droves from church today because of the rejection they have experienced or have good reason to fear. In today's churches, who then are the Sodomites?

Which brings me to a lingering question which stood out for me from this day-long discussion and exciting exchange of ideas about Queering *Thea/ology*. It springs from two sources: an appreciation of the multi-

Please turn to Page Three . . .

Gay Theology. . .from Page Two. . .

hued, diverse and complex world of God's creation, both in human community and natural order, and an awareness of God's demand to love one another in the beloved community. If the church is a community of those who hold faith to-and-with that Spirit which is God, interpreted by Jesus, and as we name ourselves to be faithful to God and followers of the Christ, then **CAN THE CHURCH BE THE CHURCH WITHOUT US?**

Our testimony then, is not simply a demand for "simple justice," but also about the very essence of what it means to be the church. ▽

*As reported by
Rebecca Richards*



From a recent newspaper article:

A Major Advance for Gays, Lesbians

Natick,[MA] back in 1992, Liz Winfield and Susan Spielman say, it was not uncommon for human resource executives to either ignore their calls or listen in stunned silence to their suggestion that firms offer domestic partner benefits to gay and lesbian workers.

"For the longest time, HR people would hang up on us," recalls 39-year-old Winfield, who manages the couple's consulting company from a home-based office here. Calls would come in from gay or lesbian employees who had been harassed, even physically threatened, and wanted their human resource departments to take some action. "But many of the HR executives wouldn't return our calls," adds Spielman, 32.

But enough did. Four years after its founding, Winfield and Spielman's company, Common Ground, can boast of 100 clients and many successes in improving the situations of gay and lesbian employees. Most recently, the Natick women were among a group of consultants who provided information to International Business Machines - leading to IBM's decision to offer full spousal benefits to the partners of gay and lesbian workers.

They say that, slowly, American employers have come to the realization that domestic partner benefits and other services can be important carrots when wooing top job applicants or simply trying to hold on to valued employees.

More than 400 employers offer domestic benefits to same-sex couples, reports Winfield. They range from Ben & Jerry's Homemade Inc., the Vermont ice cream maker with a decidedly counter cultural flavor, to buttoned-down IBM and Walt Disney Co., with its care-

fully crafted, all-American image.

To be sure, many companies don't offer spousal benefits. While the reasons vary, Winfield says she frequently hears of fear of customer disapproval and fear of AIDS. (In response to the latter, she points out that heterosexuals in certain high-risk groups are more likely to contract the AIDS virus than gay males, and that treatment for AIDS is less expensive than treatment for cancer or a coronary bypass operation.)

Some resistance is more complex. The partners say one California-based high-tech company agreed to offer gay partners benefits only after a lengthy, two-year campaign by an alliance of straight, gay, lesbian and bisexual workers. A key reason for the company's discomfort: Fear that the employees' push for benefits could evolve into a union drive.

In some cases it's very difficult for Common Ground to find common ground. "We had a call from a worker at one of the Big Three auto companies in Detroit who had been physically assaulted at work and was continually harassed," says Spielman. This was a situation where other employees spray-painted his locker and called him names, causing him to sue."

Common Ground was called in by the company at the worker's suggestion. Were the consultants able to transform a corporate culture where homosexuality was often viewed as on a par with beating up little old ladies or driving a Japanese car? Says Spielman: "We like to think that the work we did in Detroit helped. But there is also a certain percentage of people who will never hear you no matter what you are saying."

Others have heard. Among them: General Mills in Minneapolis. According to Daniel Duty, the firm's general counsel, Common Ground helped a gay and lesbian task force develop a presentation for management on why domestic benefits ought to be offered. Duty says the company is now seriously considering the change.

It is Spielman who explains that Common Ground has its roots in her request that a former employer consider domestic partner benefits. The executive wanted to know how the benefits would affect the firm's tax status, what the costs would be, and whether or not the benefits were being used elsewhere.

So Spielman enlisted Winfield's help and began collecting information. Winfield, then a laid-off technical writer and marketing representative, switched from job-hunting to information-gathering.

"When we collected the information, my vice president at the time said, 'I've next seen this kind of information. Why don't you take it, package it and maybe you can get other companies to implement these benefits?'" says Spielman.

She got the benefits she sought. She got a business in the bargain. ▽

*The following is reprinted from the October 1996 issue of **Shalom to You**, published by Shalom Ministries. Used by permission.*

The Bible and Homosexuality: Revisiting Sodom Genesis 19

Do you believe the Bible?

Lesbian and gay Christians often experience this deceptively simple question as a set-up for another round of denunciation. To answer yes is to invite a challenge to take Genesis or Leviticus or Romans seriously, while to say no seemingly puts them outside of the community of faith. The first step of Biblical self-defense is to develop a clear understanding of the purpose and function of different categories of Biblical literature.

One cannot address the question of the truth of a piece of literature without considering its genre or literary category. As a simple example, consider examples of two contemporary literary genre, a utility bill and a clothing catalog. For a utility bill to be "true," it must be addressed correctly and make an accurate report of usage and charges. The color of ink does not affect the truthfulness of a utility bill, but it can render a clothing catalog false. Similarly, the words "I owe you" must be understood differently depending upon whether they appear on a promissory note or in a Mother's Day card.

The book of Genesis is a collection of mythic stories, stories of beginning times that were told to convey truths that can best be told through story. The first eleven chapters of Genesis fall into the category of creation myths. As such, they address primary human questions: Who is God? How did we come to be? Why is there suffering, pain and evil? Why don't people get along and understand each other? Taken together, the stories tell us of a God who is loving, creative, intentional and relational, of the painful consequences of human freedom, of the capacity of jealousy and fear to rend the fabric of life. If we are to evaluate the truthfulness of these first chapters, it must be by looking to these teachings. Do they accurately portray the human condition and our relationship to what is holy? Can they teach us truths we haven't recognized? If the answer is "yes," then the stories are true, as creation myths. This does not mean that they would be true as biology or history texts.

The story of the destruction of Sodom falls

into the second cluster of Genesis stories. These stories answer two sets of questions asked by the Hebrew people after they returned to Palestine. The first set are questions that turn on identity and claim: Who are we? How did we come to be the chosen people of God? What is our claim to this land?

The other set of questions seems more mundane: Where did our place names come from? How did certain land features come to be? And yet, within this down-to-earth realm, there lurk questions of a much broader scope: What sin would justify the total destruction of a city, of all the cities on a plain?

Genesis 19 weaves all these threads together. Abraham's family journeyed from Ur to Canaan. There Abraham's nephew Lot chose to settle near Sodom, a city on a flat fertile plain pocked with pits of soft coal and pools of petroleum. A natural disaster, perhaps lightning, set off fires of catastrophic proportion. Lot and his daughters escaped the disaster that killed his wife and devastated the land.

It is easy for this author, a product of the twentieth century, to refer to the cataclysm as a "natural disaster." Such a concept did not exist for the compilers of Genesis, who would not have separated "natural" from "divine." They understood that the cities on the plain of Sodom were destroyed by God's action because God had found them to be inexcusably evil.

And what was the sin of Sodom? God had already decided to destroy the area when the men of Sodom surrounded Lot's house, demanding that he make his two guests, messenger sent by God to warn him to flee, available to them for rape and possibly murder. The sin was not gay sex. It was not, as some have claimed, simple inhospitality. It was the active willingness, on the part of the men of Sodom, to treat strangers as objects to be used and discarded, regardless of the impact of such actions on the strangers' lives and well-being. The treatment of the messengers exposed the corporate sin of Sodom. The story tells us that such willingness to use others is a corporate sin that may bring about the destruction of a people.

If this reading of the story is correct, our nation may have reason to fear on account of our treatment of undocumented immigrant or our corporate willingness to profit from the labor of children. Here is the true sodomy. Do you believe in the Bible? ▽

*Personal Observations. . .from
Page One. . .*

Our panel depicts a dark green tablecloth with two place settings and two roses. Michael and Joseph's names are hand-written, one on each side of the place settings. This is symbolic of the many wonderful family meals the four of us shared, as well as with our extended family of friends and lovers which was known as "Dudcrest." The panel was simple and meaningful to us.

"I was amazed by how many people came to see the Quilt and the awe and respect shown . . ."

Our experience at the Quilt was overwhelming in so many ways. The sheer enormity of the quilt was awesome to me. It looked like a gigantic patchwork graveyard and was made all the more poignant by the many memorial tributes left by friends and loved ones. Many flowers and mementos were placed on the individual panels and a box of Kleenex could be found on every 32-panel section of the quilt for the mourners who visited. The raw emotion of some, and the quiet stoicism of others, were all part of the experience. I was amazed by how many people came to see the Quilt and the awe and respect shown by those in its presence. David remarked that, although the Quilt had started out as a quiet protest and reminder of AIDS, it had now also become a huge display of public art.

Our experience began by submitting the panel and having it assigned to a temporary space and given a unique identification number. We were also assigned a grief

counselor to help us through the paperwork process and she stayed with us through the official pinning of our panel on it's temporary home section for the weekend. David did the actual pinning while I watched and took pictures. It was a very emotional scene, shared with the friends and family of seven other victims. Particularly moving were the husband and children who came to lay a panel for their wife and mother, a 38 year-old woman. The children were inconsolable. As the day wore on we watched as our little section was joined to three others to make a large 32-panel section and later, how it became part of the larger section of newly submitted panels. In about three or four months we'll be notified as to the panel's final resting place and final ID number.

As the afternoon wore on, we ran into friends and accompanied them to the Affirmation-sponsored reception and Memorial Service at Foundry UMC near DuPont Circle. It was good to visit with old friends and make new ones, too.

"The sheer number of people was unbelievable!"

After leaving Foundry we joined the candlelight procession from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial for what was to be one of the most moving parts of our weekend in Washington. We fell in line a short distance behind Elizabeth Taylor, who was the Grand Marshall for the March and then situated ourselves at the east end of the reflecting pool, directly opposite the Lincoln Memorial. There was a Washington, D.C., high school gospel choir singing and huge

TV screens put up around the reflecting pool so everyone could see. The sheer number of people was unbelievable! I never heard official crowd estimates for the weekend but some of the people I was with said they thought there must have been close to 200,000 people there that night. The sea of flickering lights was incredibly moving; so too was the "Faces of AIDS" presentation. About ten people spoke about their experiences of living with HIV-AIDS. These included a wide range of people, from politicians to children, the rich and famous, to the neighbor next door. At the conclusion of the program Elizabeth Taylor asked everyone to extinguish their candles as she lit an eternal flame at the base of the Lincoln Memorial. It was a very emotional moment.

"It was a very bold reminder of the enormity of the epidemic."

On Sunday David and I went back to check on Michael and Joe's panel to see how it had fared overnight. We were relieved to see it had survived the folding and unfolding and were somewhat shocked to see how much the new panel section had grown since Saturday! It was a very bold reminder of the enormity of the epidemic. We looked around some more, checking for the panels of other people we knew but finally, in the early afternoon, we had reached our saturation point and decided to go visit the National Gallery of Art before leaving for the airport to come home to Chicago.

All in all David and I both felt very good about our trip to the
Please turn to Page Eight. . .

Affirmation National Council

Richard Bates
Austin, TX

Rick Huskey
Washington, DC

Eva K. Brown
Topeka, KS

David W. Meredith
Cincinnati, OH

John R. Calhoun
Oklahoma City, OK

Rebecca Richards
Baltimore, MD

William Flint
Jackson, MS

Paul Thompson
Studio City, CA

Morris Floyd
Minneapolis, MN

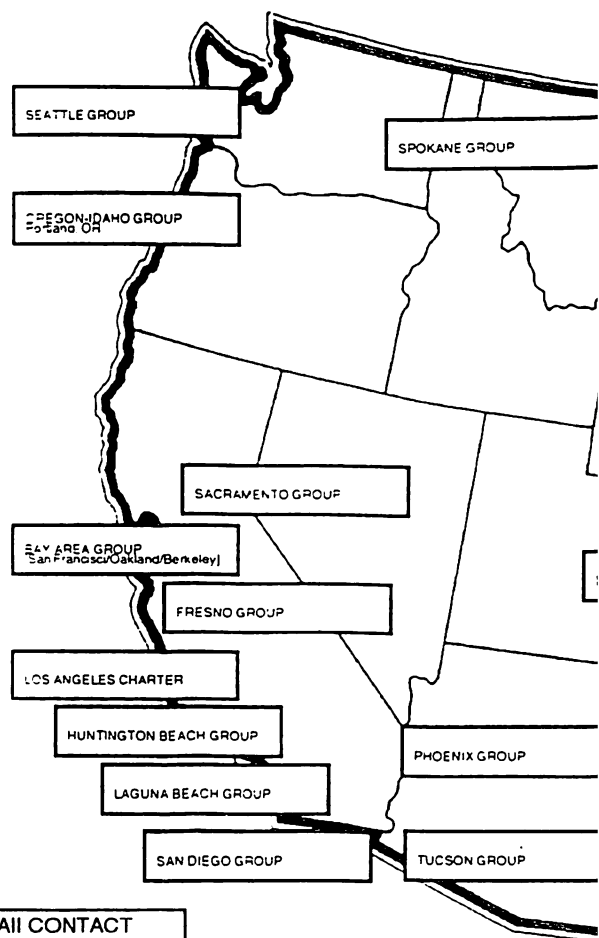
Mark Wilson
Atlanta, GA

David L. Gunnell
Evanston, IL

Sam Wilson
Dallas, TX

Judy Cara Hicks
Evanston, IL

One Woman in
New York



Please send a copy of your Newsletter or information about how, when and where your group meets. Be sure to include a contact person, address or phone number. You can send all information to Fritz Schultz, [redacted] San Francisco, CA [redacted]

Nashville Affirmation In July, the group had an outstanding program with staff and officers of the Lesbian/Gay Coalition. In September, the group gathered for dinner at the International Market. For information about monthly meetings and other activities write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 24213, Nashville, TN 37202 or call [redacted]

Affirmation Los Angeles On Wednesday, June 12, at Annual Conference, the Affirmation groups of Southern California presented the annual Burt All Award to April and Andy Herron Sweet. The award honors

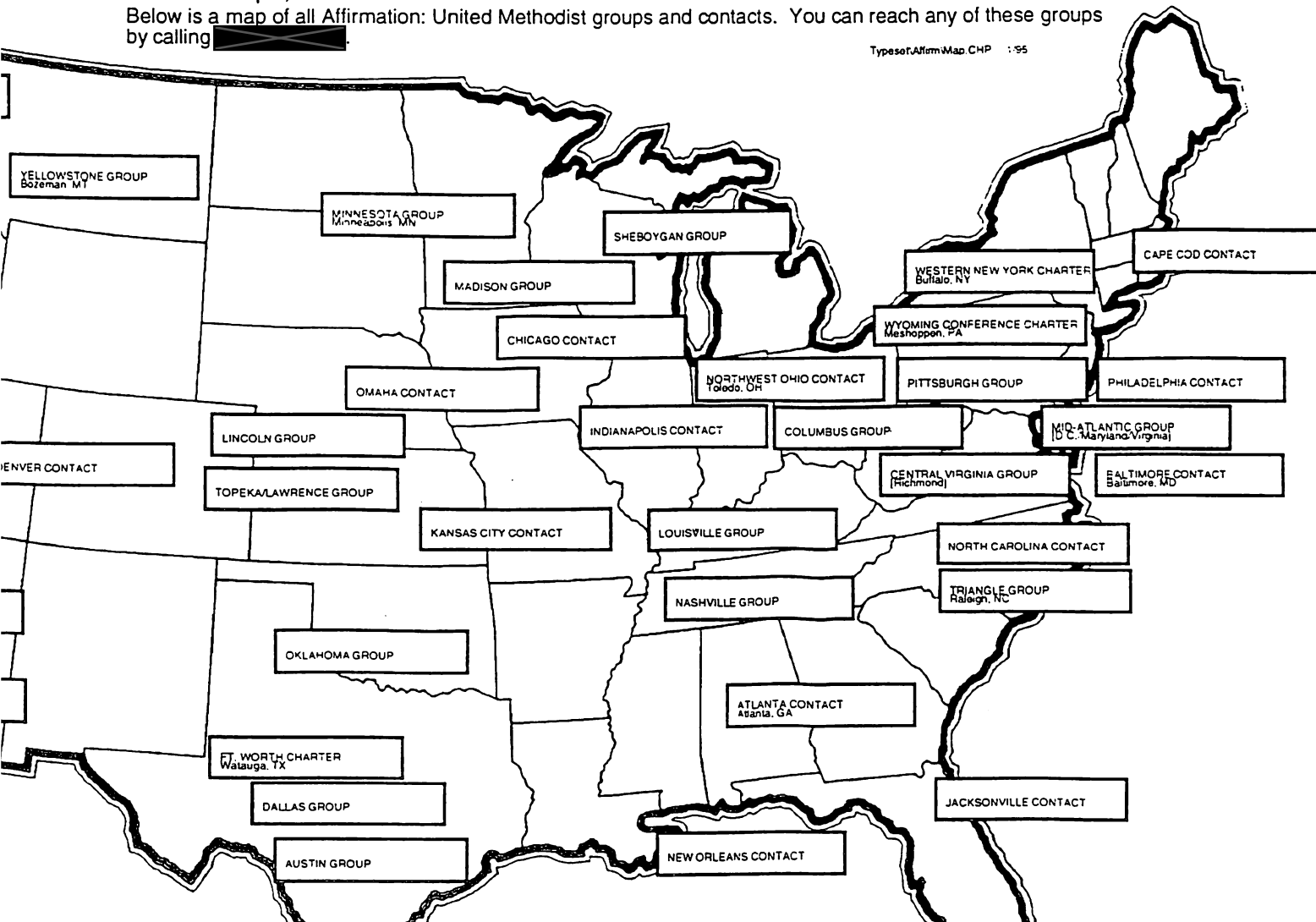
the Herron Sweets as the two people in their Conference who have most helped advance the full inclusion of Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgenders in the United Methodist Church. As part of the yearly Christopher Street West Gay Pride Festival, several groups participated in an Inter-Faith Service on Saturday, June 22nd. In July, the group had a swim party on Bastille Day. Affirmation/LA sponsored a booth at the Sunset Junction Fair August 24 and 25. The next meeting of this group will be held November 10th. Affirmation Los Angeles meets each second Sunday of the month for programs, worship, refreshments and fellowship at Holman UMC at 7:00 p.m. For more information write to [redacted], West Hollywood, CA [redacted] or call [redacted]

Dallas Affirmation In September, the group presented a Gray Machen representation using media to offer strategies on what we can do to support the "religious" members participated in October 6th. This event was for a number of local churches. Upcoming meetings include All-Saint's Service on an evening of singing and rejoicing. In November will join with other groups for an Interfaith Thanksgiving. In December will have their annual

Local Groups, Contacts and Charters

Below is a map of all Affirmation: United Methodist groups and contacts. You can reach any of these groups by calling [REDACTED]

Typeset AffirmMap.CHP 1:95



LOCAL NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

ation In
o welcomed Nancy
enting the Texas
She made her
video and other
gies and insights
combat the tactics
right". Dallas
1 in LIFEWALK on
ent raises money
AIDS charities.
clude the annual
October 28th for
ng, remembering
ember the group
community groups
celebration of
ember, the group
1 Christmas Party.

Dallas Affirmation meets for a monthly pot luck dinner with fellowship and program every fourth Monday at 7:00 pm, at Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road at Northaven Road. For additional information write to [REDACTED], Dallas, Texas [REDACTED] or call [REDACTED]

Cape Cod Affirmation meets on the first Sunday of each month at 3:00 p.m. at the Osterville UMC. Following the meeting the group goes to a local restaurant for a light Sunday supper. For more information write Barry Jones-Henry, [REDACTED] Hyannis, MA [REDACTED] or call him at [REDACTED]

Shalom Ministries On Wednesday, June 15, the Oregon-Idaho Conference voted to become a Reconciling Conference. Shalom Ministries had some fun summer activities in July, when there was a special movie night and in August there was a Support Group Beach Trip. On Saturday, October 5, friends and supporters of Shalom Ministries gathered at Lake Oswego UMC for a high-spirited evening of food, friends, fun, and fund-raising. There are a variety of support groups are held throughout the week by Shalom Ministries. For more information about Shalom Ministries write to P.O. Box 66147, Portland, OR 97266 or call [REDACTED]

Affirmation seeks to:

- coordinate advocacy with supportive United Methodist groups;
- respond to opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith witness and action;
- sponsor education and information services;
- inform members of activities in the church that may be of interest and offer suggestions as to possible responses.

I am interested in knowing more about:

- ☐ Becoming a member of national Affirmation and receive the quarterly newsletter.
- ☐ Upcoming national Affirmation Gatherings.
- ☐ Affirmation groups or events in my region or city.
- ☐ Starting a local group.
- ☐ I want to provide financial support for the work of Affirmation. Enclosed is a donation of \$_____

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Annual Conference _____

All Affirmation correspondence is mailed discretely.
All contributions to national Affirmation are tax deductible.

Mail to:

Affirmation
United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay
and Bisexual Concerns
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204.

...Personal Observations from Page Three...

Quilt because we had accomplished exactly what we set out to do and somehow felt that more closure had taken place in our coming to terms with Michael and Joe's deaths. I don't know if other visitors felt or experienced the same thing as we did. I especially still wonder about the children of the woman whose panel was next to Michael and Joe's. I'll never forget the utter despair which her teen-age son displayed. His sobs still ring in my ears. But somehow that weekend in Washington made me feel really close to Michael and Joe as I felt their presence all around me and I was surrounded by their love. I finally felt at peace with their passing. I hope that teen-aged boy will one day know that same kind of peace. ▽

Judith Cara Hicks
Evanston, IL
October 31, 1996

PLEASE NOTE!

NEW AFFIRMATION GROUP NOW FORMING!

A Detroit Chapter of Affirmation
will begin in January of 1997.

Anyone interested please
call Robin Beck at _____

From *Shalom to You*, June 1996, published by Shalom Ministries, P.O. Box 66147, Portland, OR 97290

"I pray to God that the day will soon come when our agony over the scripturally tormenting, (tormenting because Jesus did not say one word on this issue of homosexuality) and the scientifically inconclusive findings on homosexuality may be over and done with, and that this wounded and divided Church will be delivered from its unworthy preoccupation that isolates one's sexual orientation as the quintessential definition of personhood and of one's worthiness in the sight of God."

Excerpt from a sermon preached at General Conference by Bishop Edwin C. Boulton, Ohio East Area, April 25, 1996.

1997 NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

DEADLINE DATE	PUBLICATION DATE
SPRING	
February 1, 1997	February 22, 1997
SUMMER	
May 15, 1997	June 15, 1997
FALL	
July 20, 1997	August 20, 1997
WINTER	
November 1, 1997	December 1, 1997

All submissions should be sent to:
George F. Hodgdon
Newsletter Editor

New Bedford, MA _____

Affirmation Newsletter
Published by the Evangelism
Committee of Affirmation
David Gunnell, Chairperson
George F. Hodgdon, Editor

Affirmation: United Methodists
for Lesbian, Gay and
Bisexual Concerns
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204
Tel. (847) 733-9590
E-Mail:
umaffirm@concentric.net

Affirmation Newsletter is published quarterly and is mailed to every member of Affirmation.

The official views of Affirmation are stated by the Co-Spokespersons.

Opinions offered in signed columns, letters and articles are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

We reserve the right to edit or reject any material submitted for publication.



From the Editor's Corner

Is the Church Relevant?

Does the Church Say Anything to Us About our Daily Lives?

Two articles came to the desk of the editor recently, which will shed some light on this issue. One is the November newsletter from The United Methodist Church in Osterville, MA; the other "Our Church Week" for November 10 from St. Lawrence, Martyr (RC) Church in New Bedford, MA.

Pastor Stephen Stolle of the UMC asks "I wonder whoever thought what we do in worship is disconnected from the world in which we live?" And further he writes:

"A sage reminds us:

"When we lift up bread with prayer in worship, as Christians do in the Holy Communion, we are making bread a religious issue.

"When we lift up children with prayer, as we do in baptism, we are making children a religious statement.

"When we hear, 'As you have done it to the least of people, you have done it to me. . . ' we are speaking from our faith about those on the margins of society.

"When we do these things, then we will have some counter-cultural views about bread and children, about power and inclusiveness."

Getting the idea? Worship and "religious issues" are integral parts of the Church, are they not? And if the Church is concerned about bread and children and marginalized members of society, then the Church is relevant to our lives, even though we know that The United Methodist Church has yet to include us along with those other "marginalized persons." But we have a wonderful and powerful weapon in the words of Jesus quoted above: "As you have done it to the least of people, you have done it to me. . ." and someday The United Methodist Church will hear and understand and obey.

And when that day comes, we must be prepared!

Which brings us to the second article on the editor's desk—the article from "Our Church Week." Nancy Forest-Flier writes about being prepared (Matt. 25:1-13), stating that if we are to be prepared we must live in the "present moment." And she makes some suggestions to help us:

Try keeping a schedule

Put prayer at the top of the schedule

Turn interruptions into prayers

Do things that pull you into the present moment

Put the brakes on runaway time

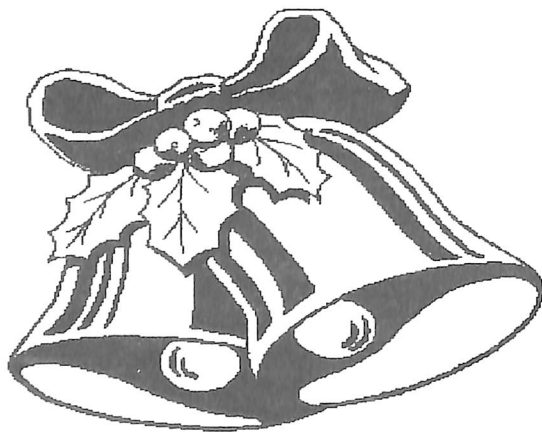
We have determined that the Church is relevant to our daily lives, but how do we latch onto that "relevancy"? Is it not by being prepared, by preparing ourselves for whatever lies ahead? Basically, what Forest-Flier is suggesting is that we prepare ourselves through prayer! And she makes some very good suggestions to help us lead a life of prayer—by organizing our lives with prayer given top

Please turn to Page Twelve

Building the Spirit

Shalom Ministries of Portland, Oregon, will host a retreat February 21-23, 1997, entitled *Building the Spirit III: Being a Reconciling Conference*. After a keynote address on the Biblical imperative for reconciling ministries as justice work, participants will choose between varied workshops, including sessions focused on lesbian and gay marriage, staying at the table when we disagree, pastoral issues in a reconciling conference, and language that builds bridges instead of walls. Each day will be framed in worship, and Saturday evening will feature entertainment and a "Fishbowl" conversation between The Rev. Jeanne Audrey Powers and others about the blessings, costs and learnings that come from being in the struggle for inclusion for the long haul. Prices for registration, meals and lodging range from \$110 each for quad housing (four single bunks to a room) to \$160 for single housing, with a \$10 discount for registration before January 15. On-site housing is limited—register early to ensure a place. Late registrants may be asked to arrange space at a motel four miles from the retreat site.

For more information, contact Shalom Ministries at P.O. Box 66147, Portland, OR 97290. Telephone [REDACTED] ▽



Seasons Greetings

Listening to the Woman Who Used to be Married to Lot

How dare you!

You who have seen the fire and brimstone
of life and trembled
to fear you might not be immune;

You who spin away from seeing the violence
of life and want to blame me,
my choices,
for your terror;

You who desire a violent God,
but not for you,
not for your choices;

How dare you even think
that that salt pillar
is about my life?

It is not me.
You do not know me.
You have called my name
to name your terror,
your violence,
your desire for retribution, your stoniness,
your bitter salted spirit.

And I will not have it.

I am not there.
I am not stone
I am the woman who loved,
who lingered,
who went her own way,
who disappeared from your midst
to create her own life
that did not include you
and your terror.

You do not have my permission
to use your story of my life
to control your fear
of my freedom

Jeanne Knepper
10-18-96

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR COUNCIL

Want to be a key player in opportunities for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, questioning and supportive persons in the church? Know someone who has shown the ability to do so? **Then please use the form the form below** to volunteer or nominate that qualified person to serve on Affirmation's national Council.

Ten of the twenty Council members will be elected from "regions" in Spring 1997 to serve from April 1997 to April 2000. The regions are the same as The United Methodist Church jurisdictions for the United States. **Nominations need to be received by January 18, 1997!** Voting will be by mailed ballot of current paid members.

Persons from the wide diversity of the UMC are encouraged to run—geography, clergy/laity, race, ethnic heritage, gender, sexual identity, technical ability (or technical klutz!), communications knowledge, economic means, church background, urban/rural etc. Half of the Council is female, half male. All of us are important in our mission to support each other and be a witness within and to The United Methodist Church.

The Council meets three times a year to decide the direction of national Affirmation, provide a presence with the UMC and other church organizations, set the budget, communicate with individuals and local groups, arrange for national meetings and work with the newsletter editor to produce this newsletter. Travel expenses are paid by Affirmation to go to the January retreat meetings.

For more information, contact Council co-coordinator John Calhoun at 

Please mail the form below to:

Affirmation Nominations
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204

Yes! I nominate the following person to serve on Affirmation's national Council for a three-year term beginning April 1997:

Name _____ Sex _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Annual Conference _____

I have contacted the above person and he/she agrees to be nominated.

(signature of person making nomination)

"Is the Church Relevant?" from Page Nine. . .
 priority; by making good use of things that
 interfere, rather than giving in to despair; by
 controlling and well-utilizing our time, rather
 than letting time control us. She suggests
 listening to our own choice of music (but not to
 use it as background noise) fully concentrating
 and "Keep[ing] your mind utterly free to enjoy
 this time in the presence of God."

It is so easy to say "lead a life of prayer."
 To say we should "be prepared." We all realize
 that it takes determination and perseverance
 and dedication to succeed. But what
 worthwhile goals are ever achieved without
 these virtues? What better way to express our
 faithfulness? ▽

*(Please note: The opinions expressed in this
 column are those of the editor and not
 necessarily those of national Affirmation.)*

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

From "Shalom to You" October 1996:

RITUAL ABUSE

" . . . Ritual abuse is a heinous perversion
 of religion wherein a group of people seek
 power, mastery and the favor of God or Satan
 through the use of rituals that involve
 emotional, physical and sexual torture and
 abuse of the most violent sort. The victims
 are usually children who, if they survive to
 adulthood, live with extreme guilt and shame."

Another Psalm in the next column was
 submitted to "Shalom to You" by "A Survivor"
 and is reprinted here with permission.
 "Shalom to You" is published by Shalom
 Ministries, P.O. Box 66147, Portland, OR
 97290.

ANOTHER PSALM

The Lord is my shepherd
 I do want!

A childhood that was ripped from me,
 The love from the father who raped me,
 The love from the father who deserted me.

I've walked through turbulent waters,
 Satanic rituals,
 Abusive family members,
 Discrimination!
 Will He restore my soul?

He stood by while others lead me down the
 path of destruction,
 For whose name sake?
 Satan's?
 Bob, Earl, Pastor Anderson
 Grandpa, Richard, and Paul?

I've walked through the valley of the shadow
 of death,
 I do fear evil.
 Was he with me
 When I cried for help and
 no one answered?
 When I pleaded for mercy and
 didn't get it?
 When I asked for death and
 was told to survive?

Did his rod and staff comfort me?
 Guard me from evil,
 As they guard sheep from predators?
 My predators got by!

A table was prepared for me in
 the presence of mine enemies,
 And I was the feast.

My head was anointed with oil,
 For sacrificial reasons.
 My cup overfloweth with pain.
 Surely guilt and suffering will
 follow me all the days of my life.

Will I ever dwell in the house of the Lord?



*Seasons Greetings
 to ALL*

